

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## DISABLED SPORTSMEN TO GET CHANCE TO HUNT

Disabled sportsmen in wheelchairs will have an opportunity to hunt Sika and white-tailed deer November 27 through December 1 on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia through a special program sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Disabled Sportsmen of America.

The deer herd at Chincoteague, estimated to be about 750 head, is too large for the refuge to support. Hunting is allowed for recreation and to reduce the deer population to a level that balances with the habitat. Unless this is done continuously, the deer would soon literally eat themselves out of house and home and eventually either starve or be susceptible to disease.

Last fall, handicapped persons participated in an experimental hunt at Chincoteague. It was so successful that plans were developed to make it an annual event and Service officials are now exploring the possibility of conducting hunts for handicapped sportsmen on some of the other national wildlife refuges which use public hunting programs as a means of managing selected wildlife populations. Currently 112 of the 391 national wildlife refuges allow controlled public hunting for deer and other big game animals.

"We hope this hunt will be used as a model which will be followed on other Federal and State lands," Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Robert Herbst said.

Hunting at Chincoteague has been available to the non-disabled population for a number of years. The hunting program for disabled persons was an outgrowth of an extended effort to serve handicapped people that began two years ago after one handicapped visitor asked the refuge manager, "Why don't you want me here?"

In order for either handicapped or able-bodied sportsmen to be eligible to hunt on the refuge they must first pass a State hunter safety course. In addition, they must score 100 percent on a test of current refuge and State hunting regulations and must show their proficiency in the use of firearms by firing three consecutive rifle shots into a 12-inch bullseye at 50 yards. All hunters must also possess a valid Virginia hunting license.

The area selected for the hunt allows disabled hunters freedom of mobility while also offering a maximum amount of safety. Throughout the hunting area is a blacktopped walking trail. The day before the hunt begins, participants tour the mile-and-a-half-long area of dense vegetation and trees interspersed with clearings and marshes.